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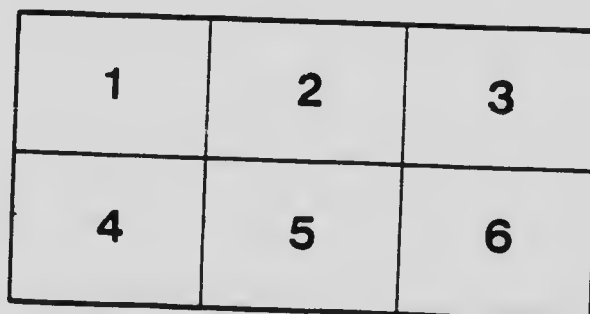
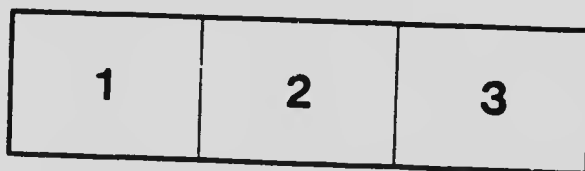
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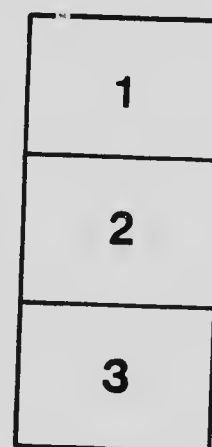
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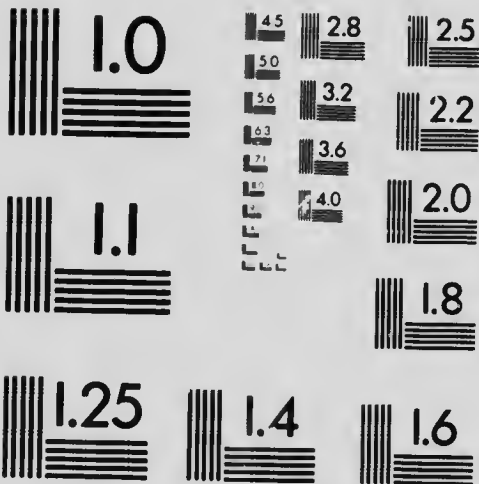
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**SAINT GEORGE THE MARTYR
XII REPRESENTATIONS BY ARTISTS
OF THE XIV-XVI CENTURIES
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY G. F. HILL**

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XII REPRESENTATIONS BY ARTISTS
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WITH INTRODUCTION & NOTES
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INTRODUCTION

THE legend of St. George divides of itself into two portions. One of these, the fight with the dragon and the rescue of the Princess, is as universal in its character as the passion for romance and the admiration of chivalry are deeply rooted in the heart of mankind. It is the mediaeval analogue to the legend of Perseus and Andromeda. The story has also been shown to be similar in type to the myths of Mithras and Horus; and was not Zeus the chief god of the saint's city Diospolis, and was not Zeus known in one aspect as Georgos? However this may be, the Western mind, Greek or Christian, has invested the story with a new, romantic, and more human sense. The second portion of the St. George legend, his adventures as a martyr, belongs to the general stock of martyr-legends, elaborated in the early centuries out of a small germ of truth. The false Acts of St. George were already denounced by Pope Gelasius at the end of the fifth century. What the germ was in the case of St. George we can hardly say. But it is clear enough that his cult, official or not, existed before the time of that other notorious George, ex-pork-butcher and Arian bishop of Alexandria, with whom Gibbon cynically sought to identify the patron saint of England. Disputes and researches about the

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origins of saint-legends are, however, the business of hagiographers; an interest more general lies in the way these legends appealed to the minds of those who believed them, and of the artists who illustrated their belief. The fight with the dragon of course gave ample opportunity for a stirring picture; the difficulty was to make the dragon horrible enough, and it must be confessed that - palaeontology being a science then unborn - the monsters evolved by the mediaeval mind are as a rule singularly unconvincing. Occasionally the result is frankly comical, as in a German water-ewer at Florence, in which the dragon is like nothing so much as an unpleasant insect crawling up the hind leg of St. George's charger, who looks back supercilious and unmoved; or as in Melchior Feselen's picture, where the Princess leads the most sheep-like of monsters back to the city at the end of her girdle.

As the conqueror of the dragon and the rescuer of the maiden in distress, St. George is the type and symbol of chivalry; and he is also *equitum patronus*, the saint to whom all good horsemen pray, and who can preserve them from accident while they are riding. Innumerable are the medal-amulets, made since the sixteenth century, with Christ in the ship on one side, and St. George on horseback on the other, to preserve the wearer from danger by flood and

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field. The Church may have seen in him also the Vanquisher of the Forces of Evil, in fact another St. Michael. But since in art St. George's dragon is always a real dragon, if the term may be allowed, and not one of those semi-human monsters that are pierced by the spear of the Archangel, we may assume that this interpretation was not much insisted upon.

An erudite German has studied in detail the iconography of St. George in Italian Art. The type of the rider slaying a monster is, as he shows, only a natural development of various equestrian groups, of deities or emperors, with sometimes human, sometimes animal foes prostrate beneath their steeds. Given a horseman and a dragon-foe, it is difficult to see how any type, other than that which was familiar on reliefs and coins since Hellenistic times, could have been adopted. The thirteenth-century relief over the Porta S. Giorgio at Florence is a lineal descendant - for the resemblance can hardly be a mere coincidence - of the funeral monument of Dexileos at Athens. It is not until we reach the fourteenth century that all the essentials of the scene appear: - the saint armed with shield as well as spear, the dragon not placed hieratically under his horse but attacking from a distance, and, above all, the Princess and spectators. This last development is especially the mark of the

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age of chivalry; here is the legend in full romantic dress.

The single figure, however, retained its importance for painters and sculptors. Standing, with the dragon at his feet, St. George was as effective a figure as St. Michael to fill a side panel or to stand beside the Virgin and Child. Perhaps the noblest instance of his appearance in this function is in Giorgione's *Madonna of Castelfranco*. Donatello's famous statue of St. George, once in its niche at Or San Michele, now in the Bargello, is on the other hand a good instance of the great sculptor's independence of tradition; it is difficult to see in this figure anything but a fine specimen of Italian peasant youth dressed up in character. Yet his fine little bas-relief of the fight with the dragon, below the niche, is a true realisation of the subject. To admit all this is not to deny the proud claims of this figure in every other respect. We are at any rate still far from the stage of development in which an artist's friend or patron masquerades as the Saint. If we wish to grasp all the wide difference between a true and a false conception in art, we may compare, on the one hand, the noble fresco of St. George presenting one of the Cavalli knights to the Virgin, in Sant' Anastasia at Verona, or the quite sincere Flemish picture in the Munich Gallery of the Saint as patron of an

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unknown donor, with, on the other hand, the portrait of Stephan Paumgartner as St. George, also at Munich. That this last production is from Dürer's hand makes the fall seem the more abject and deplorable.

To return to the story. The stages subsequent to the fight with the dragon are not frequently represented in art. The scene of the Princess leading by her girdle the vanquished monster - now a 'meke beest and debonayre' - is more favoured than any other. The parting from the Princess is, apparently, the subject of a single fresco, by Pisanello. The interesting Spanish altarpiece of the fifteenth century at South Kensington shows, among other scenes of his life and death, how he fought with the Crusaders against the Moors, and four interesting panels of the same school and period in the Louvre depict four scenes from his martyrdom. Nevertheless, the martyrdom scenes, for some reason, seldom took hold of the imagination of the old artists; one may count the renderings of them on the fingers. Yet there is one series of frescoes of the subject, in the Chapel of St. George at Padua, by Altichiero and Avanzo, which, with the St. Lucy frescoes by the same masters, form the chief monument of that Veronese school of painting which so nobly carried on the torch of Giotto at a time when Florentine art almost seemed to be

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slackening to a premature death. There is an illuminated manuscript, '*Missarum libri et Sancti Georgii martyris historia*,' executed by some Sienese artist for Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi, and now in the Capitular Archives of St. Peter's. Here there was every opportunity for details such as the drinking of the poisoned cup, or the torture on the wheel, or the boiling in lead, such as the mediaeval artist represented so cheerfully; but we have nothing but the final scene of the decollation. This last subject was also treated, in characteristic style, by Paul Veronese, in *San Giorgio at Verona*. The suggestion has been made, and may be true, that the early condemnation of the Acts by Papal authority was the cause of the comparative rarity of these representations.

The function of St. George as patron of the Order of the Garter, especially interesting to Englishmen, does not come within our present scope. The curious in this matter may consult Ashmole; and may thereafter keep their eyes open for representations of St. George wearing the Garter, as he does in Raphael's picture in the Hermitage, or in the fine fifteenth-century miniature in the Bedford Book of Hours in the British Museum, where the Duke of Bedford, Henry I's brother, kneels before the Saint, who is clad in the mantle of the Order.

PLATES

The Fight with the Dragon :-

1. Pisanello. St. George about to depart for the Fight. Sant' Anastasia, Verona.
2. Jacopo Bellini. From the Sketch-book, Louvre, Paris.
3. Giovanni Bellini. Sant' Ubaldo, Pesaro.
4. Carpaccio. S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni, Venice.
5. Raphael. Drawing in the Uffizi, Florence.

After the Fight :-

6. Carpaccio. The Triumph of St. George. S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni, Venice.
7. Carpaccio. St. George baptizes the King and Queen. S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni, Venice.
8. Altichieri and Avanzo. Decollation of St. George. Capella di S. Giorgio, Padua.

Single Figures :-

9. Donatello. Museo Nazionale, Florence.
10. Pisanello. National Gallery, London.
11. Andrea Mantegna. Accademia, Venice.
12. Albert Dürer. Copper Engraving of 1508.

Numbers 1 and 8, pages 11 and 29, are after photographs by Alinari.

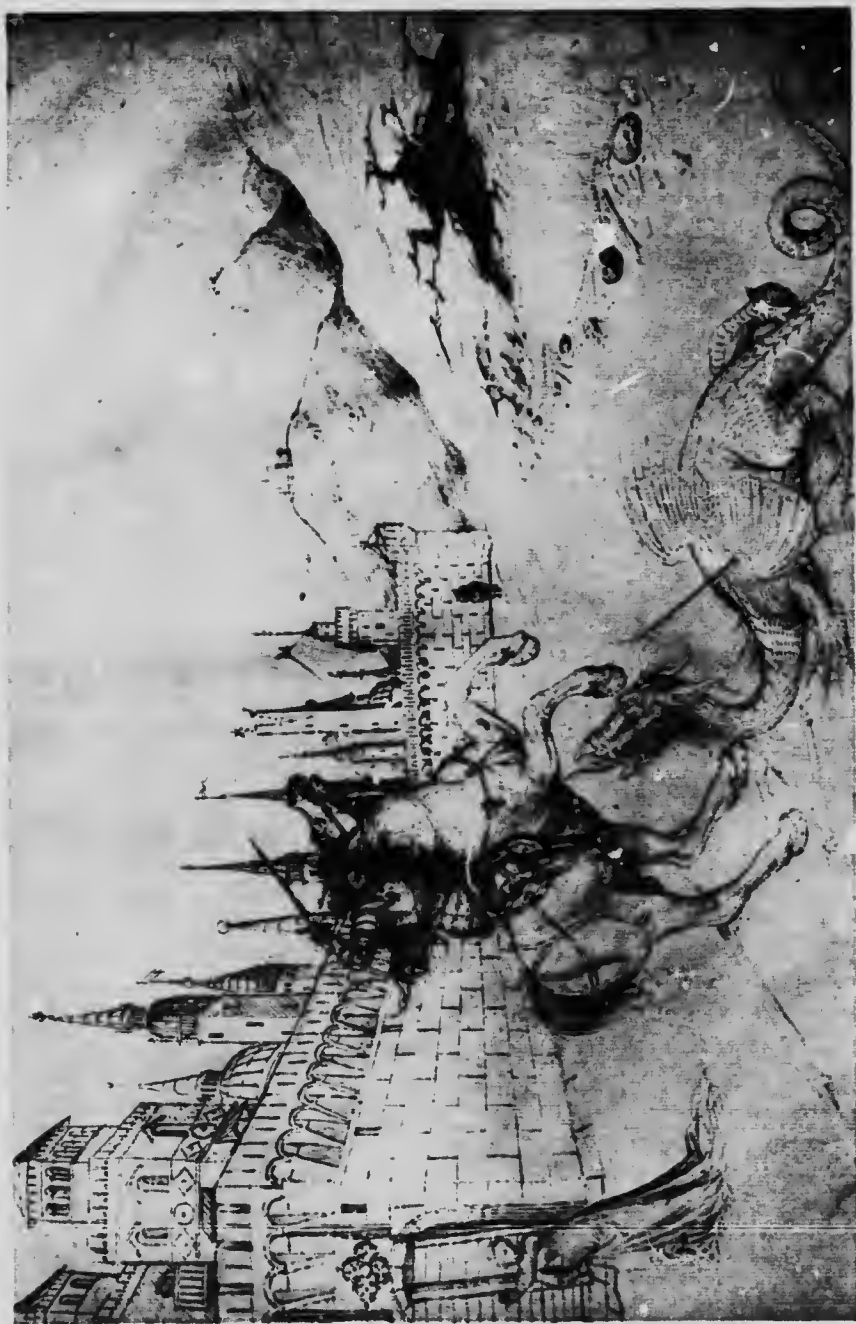
i. PISANELLO (Antonio Pisano). Sant' Anastasia, Verona.

This fresco, Pisanello's masterpiece in the art, and dating perhaps from about 1445, is on the outer face of the Pellegrini chapel in S. Anastasia. What remains of it was described by Fra Marco Medici to Vasari as St. George taking leave of the Princess after his victory. But it is possible to discern among the almost obliterated remains of the fresco on the left hand side of the arch that the dragon is not yet slain; nor was there here a representation of the fight, for there is no room on that side of the arch for a figure of the Saint. The dragon is evidently waiting in its den, and Pisanello must have followed a version of the legend in which St. George did not rescue the Princess from the actual clutches of the monster. 'Admirable,' says Vasari of Fra Marco, 'is the figure of St. George who . . . is on the point of remounting his horse, and stands with his person and face turned towards the people and, one foot being in the stirrup, and his left hand on the saddle, appears in the very motion of springing on to his horse; the horse has his crupper turned towards the people, and is all visible, being foreshortened and gotten into a small space most excellently.'



2. JACOPO BELLINI. Louvre, Paris.

One of the finest of the drawings from Jacopo Bellini's sketch-book which was acquired by the Louvre in 1884. In this book the drawings in silver-point have been gone over by the master in ink; in the equally if not more famous sketch-book in the British Museum, on the other hand, the re-touching is less frequent, but the general state of preservation of the drawings is not good. The Louvre book is slightly the later of the two, showing greater skill, but both probably belong to the period between 1450 and 1460.



3. GIOVANNI BELLINI. Sant' Ubaldo.
Pesaro.

The great Coronation of the Virgin, originally commissioned for the church of San Francesco at Pesaro, is now placed in Sant' Ubaldo. The main composition is flanked by pilasters with figures of saints; on the base of that on the left is the Fight with the Dragon. The influence of the painter's father Jacopo is clear in the general composition and in the treatment of the horse, as comparison with the Louvre drawing on the preceding plate will show; but the dragon is a poor creature beside Jacopo's. The picture dates from the period 1480 to 1490.



4. VETTOR CARPACCIO. S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni, Venice.

The series of small pictures on canvas, commissioned from Carpaccio by the Dalmatians resident in Venice for their school, were executed between 1502 and 1508. Scenes from the lives of St. Jerome and St. Tryphonius as well as St. George were included in the series. In this rendering of the Fight with the Dragon we notice the gruesome details of half-eaten corpses. The same characteristic is found in the remarkable Preparation for the Burial of Christ, in the Berlin Gallery. Where Carpaccio was unable, from the nature of the subject, to indulge his delight in picturesque costume, he attempted, not too successfully - for his spirit was a gentle one - to excite the imagination by 'property' horrors of this kind.



5. RAPHAEL. Drawing in the Uffizi, Florence.

Raphael painted two pictures of the Fight with the Dragon. The earlier, dating from 1504, is now in the Louvre, and represents the saint armed with a sword. The later, of 1506, in which a lance is used, was commissioned by the Duke of Urbino, who had received the Garter from King Henry VII of England, and the Saint was accordingly represented wearing the Garter. The picture was taken to England in 1506 by Baldassare Castiglione, but is now in the Hermitage.

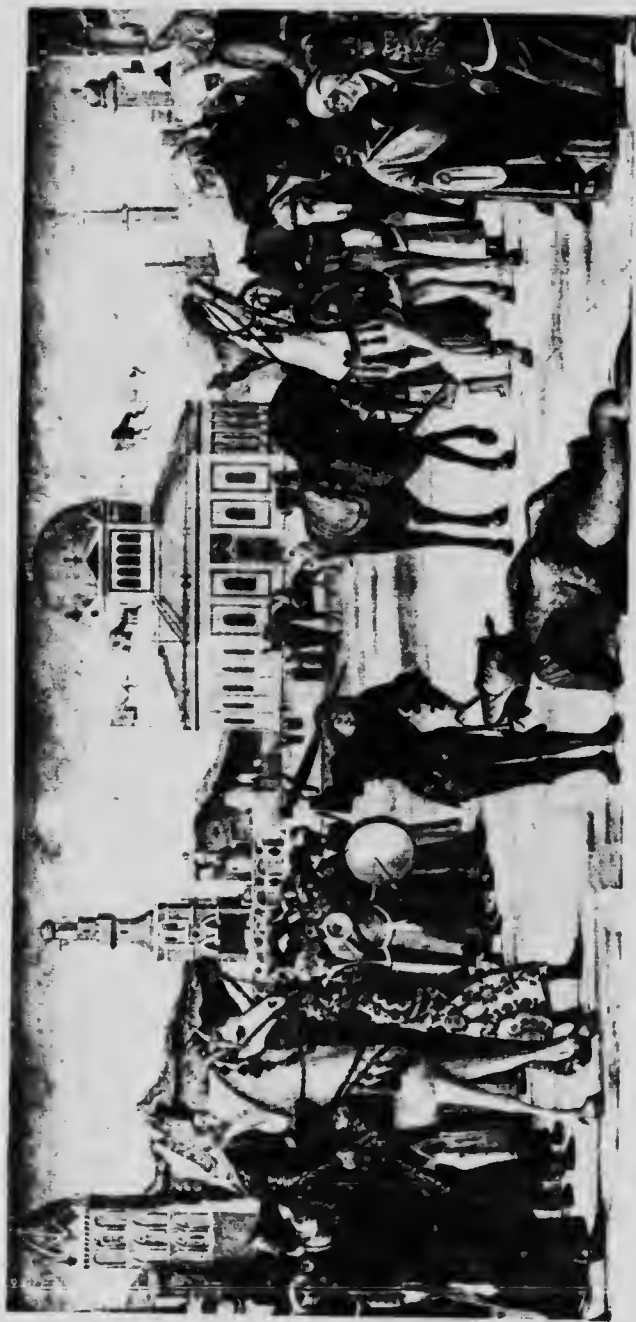
Much finer than the finished paintings—in producing which the enthusiasm with which the essentially unwarlike painter may have begun on the subject had time to cool—are the preliminary studies in the Uffizi, of which that for the Hermitage picture is reproduced here.



6. CARPACCIO. S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni,
Venice.

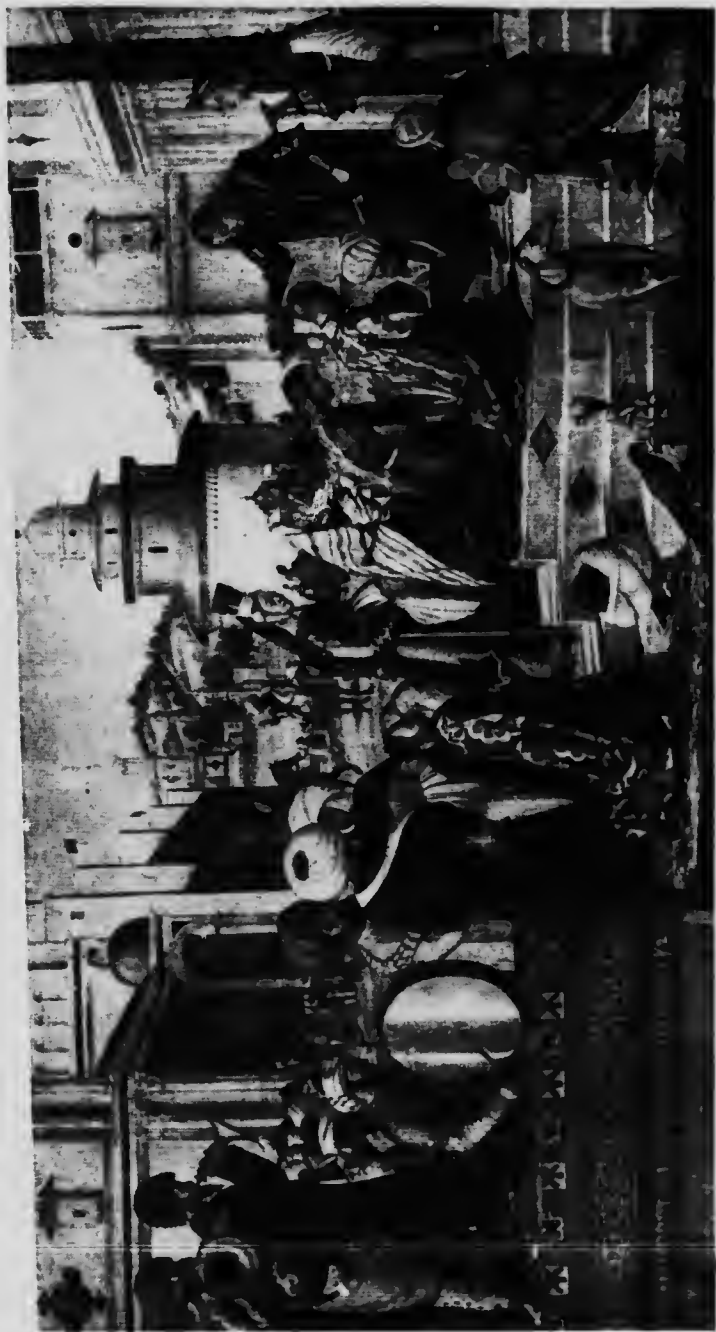
'And after (Saynt George) sayd to the mayde:
Delyver to me your gyrdel, and bynde it aboute
the necke of the dragon and be not aferde.
Whan she had done so the dragon folowed her
as it had been a meek beest and debonayre.
Than she ledde hym in to the cite, and the
people fledde by mountaynes and valeys, and
sayd: Alas! alas! we shall all be deed. Than
Saynt George sayd to them: Ne dcoubt ye no
thyng; without more byleve ye in God, Jesu
Chryst, and do you to be baptysed and I shall
slee the dragon. Than the kyng was baptysed
and all his people, and Saynt George slewe the
dragon and smote off his heed, and commaunded
that he shold be throwen in the feldes, and they
toke iiij. cartes with oxen that drewe hym out of
the cite.' - Caxton's Golden Legend.

The picture is another of the series from
S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni - see Plate 3.



7. **CARPACCIO.** S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni,
Venice.

The third picture of the series by Carpaccio bears a signature and the date MDVIII on the steps of the platform on which the ceremony of baptism is taking place; but the authenticity of the inscription is doubtful, although it represents accurately the authorship of the picture and its approximate date.



8. ALTICHERI and AVANZO. Capella di S. Giorgio, Padua.

‘On the morowe Dacyen gave his sentence that Saynt George sholde be drawn through all the cite, and after, his heed shold be smytten of. Than made he his prayer to our Lord that all they that desyred ony bone myght gete (it) of our Lorde God in his name. And a voyce came from heven whiche sayd that it whiche he had desyred was graunted. And after he had made his oreyson his heed was smytten of, aboute the yere of our Lord ii.C.lxxxvij.’ - Caxton’s Golden Legend.

Altichieri da Zevio and Avanzo were the leading masters working in Verona and Padua during the second half of the trecento. In the former city little of their work remains; but the frescoes of the legends of St. George and St. Lucy at Padua are the chief monument of North Italian art of that period.



9. DONATELLO. Museo Nazionale, Florence.

This figure, perhaps Donatello's most popular work, was originally made in 1416 for the gild of armourers, and stood in a niche of Or San Michele; it has now for some years been removed to the Bargello. Marvellous as it is as a lifelike figure of a youth, with armour fitting so perfectly that Donatello's patrons must have been delighted, it is difficult to see in it any attempt to realize the ideal of chivalry and romance; the Tuscan peasant model stands plain to view.



10. **PISANELLO** (Antonio Pisano). National Gallery, London.

This figure, whose quaint costume makes him a popular favourite, is taken from the small panel in which he stands facing St. Anthony the Hermit; above is a figure of the Virgin with the Child in a halo. The picture belongs to the period 1441-1448, and was doubtless painted for Leonello d'Este. The contrast between this court cavalier and the romantic hero of the fresco of Sant' Anastasia is remarkable, and shows how completely the painter could make his talents serve the purpose of a courtier-art.



II. ANDREA MANTEGNA. Accademia,
Venice.

This little panel, which came from the Manfrin Collection, is dated by Kristeller shortly before the Mantuan frescoes of the Camera degli Sposi, which were completed in 1474. It is instructive to compare the figure with Donatello's statue; both are equally alive, but the later conception is an attempt, such as Donatello did not make, to realize the ideal St. George. Kristeller rightly says that it is 'perhaps the earliest ideal picture of modern art, not merely an imaginary picture, but an embodiment of the ideal sides of the actual vigorous tendencies of the men of that great period.'



12. ALBERT DÜRER. Copper Engraving of
1508.

The date on this plate appears to have been altered from 1505 to 1508; presumably it was originally finished in the former year, set aside and altered in the latter. In the interval Dürer had travelled in Italy and learned much. But it is unlikely that the plate was merely begun in 1505; it must have been brought nearly to a conclusion, since the date and signature would naturally be the last thing engraved. Whether he altered much in the light of his newly-acquired knowledge may be doubted. In any case we have one of his finest compositions; and, since the facial types that he affects are not always pleasing, sometimes not even dignified, the effect is helped by the attitude, which leaves the features largely to the beholder's imagination.

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